Women's Co-operative Guild.

WOMEN ON MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES.

A Few Reasons why Women should sit on Management Committees of Co-operative Societies.

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Women on Management Committees.

I WILL endeavour, as briefly as possible, to place before you a few reasons which, to my mind, in themselves ought to be sufficient to convince any person that it is equally as fitting a position for a woman to occupy as a man.

Allow me to remark, at the outset, when I speak of women, I refer to qualified women—women who are capable of performing the duties required of them in a business-like way, thoughtfully, earnestly, and energetically. We are not all adapted for this work, any more than all the men are; but I believe the best training school for a woman who has time to devote to this work is the branch work of the Women's Co-operative Guild.

The first reason is because the co-operative movement is as much a woman's movement as a man's, each sex, in most societies, being equally eligible for membership; that—as women are admitted as members on the same conditions as men, with equal rights and duties—they should take their share of the responsibilities, and, so far as I know, whenever they have been permitted to do so, have fully and faithfully discharged these duties. Working women are generally the retail purchasers of the goods dealt in by co-operative societies, and therefore understand generally the qualities of goods offered for sale, and also what are fair and just prices.

There seems to be, among some men, a suspicion that a woman, however well she manages her home, is utterly unable to take part in the management of other matters. They seem to forget that if the goods we purchase from the stores in small quantities are not what they expect them to be, whether it be food, clothes, or shoes, they at once blame us for our judgment. The same thing

applies to wholesale purchasers, and if we are considered to be qualified to carry out the purchasing necessary for a household, this experience should fit us for taking our part in the management of our co-operative stores. A woman is by some men expected to understand the quality of flour, the flavour of tea and coffee, the taste of butter and cheese, the fit of a dress, mantle, or bonnet, the quality of boots, shoes, clothes, carpets, and, in fact, to combine in one the trades of grocer, draper, hosier, milliner, shoemaker, dressmaker, and everything necessary to home life.

Now tell me if so many qualifications can be found in men generally as are expected from women. We find that men stick to one trade, in general, whether it be engineer, moulder, carpenter, blacksmith, tailor, shoemaker, or whatever other trade they take up; yet these same men claim to be able to better manage the varied business of a co-operative store, and examine the qualities of cloth, linen, hosiery, ribbons, laces, &c., to say nothing of groceries and butter, than a woman, who is from her childhood taught these things, and learns from practical experience how to judge of these things. I contend that women would bring to the work of store management a practical, and in some cases hard-gained, experience.

I have heard it stated that the women did their part of the work among the pioneers of the movement; but, whether this be true or not at Rochdale, I know in a society in an adjoining town to where I live, some thirty years since there was both a committee of men and women to manage it. The women met during one or more afternoons in the week, as needed, the men in the evening. Both sections of this society have long since dissolved. But the seeds of co-operation sown by this small society are bearing fruit, for the children of some of these early co-operators are among the best supporters of the co-operative movement in that town and district.

Women are considered to be qualified to sit on poor-law boards as guardians, to look after the supplies needed, both of food, clothing, shoes, housing, nursing, educating, in fact,

everything referring to poor-law work, which involves the spending of many thousands of pounds of public money, and their judgment upon samples of goods is accepted, and their advice acted upon. The same rule applies to school boards. How many women now occupy seats throughout the country? Their judgment is sought not only upon the matters directly relating to education, but on the erection and furnishing of palatial school buildings. Women are considered not to understand plans and drawings of buildings; still, they are making these things their study, and I have never yet read or heard of a woman either on poor-law or school boards shirking any part of her work; but always willing, and desirous to do their part of the work faithfully and well. If we, as women, can take our share in the work of these public bodies, can we not also do the same in the management of our societies? The duties are not more difficult, the responsibilities more great, nor the strain more severe. We do not desire to take the places of competent men on these management committees; but we do claim, as members of the same societies, with equal interests at stake, our right to share the duties of management, and bring to the work a calm and clear judgment on all matters brought before us, free from bias.

No one, I think, will dare to say, after what I have stated, we are not capable of carrying out our duties. Women must and will take their places on the boards of our co-operative societies in the future, much more so than in the past. If women are considered qualified to sit on the Central Board of the Co-operative Union, sex being no barrier to election, I think the day is not far distant when on the management committee of every co-operative society in the kingdom, whose rules admit to membership both sexes equally, at least one or two women should be found.

Secondly, some of our co-operative societies employ large numbers of young women and girls in the various departments. There often arises some little friction between these and the foremen, forewomen, or managers of departments over some perhaps trivial matters, which it is difficult to explain. A woman can in most

cases, with a little tact, draw out the aggrieved one to tell her all the facts of the case, especially if she has shown her interest in the employees by attending to their welfare, which can be done by seeing that seats are provided for them to rest a moment when not actually engaged in their duties; in visiting them in times of sickness or accident, showing in a quiet and sympathetic way you care for their welfare; if it is necessary to inquire upon any matter, never treating them as your inferiors, but as sisters and friends; always, if it is at all possible without injury to the society, to accede to their request for, say, an hour's leave of absence; when not possible to accede to the request, speak firmly and friendly; and I have never yet found by this friendly feeling that any seeming slight or offence was manifest, but a willingness and readiness to do for the best. Should occasion arise to deal strongly with any employee, while not countenancing the wrong-doing, point out the consequences, and be firm, yet kind, remembering "to err is human, to forgive divine." If repentance or sorrow is exhibited, note it, and deal with others as you would be dealt unto. Be ever ready to forgive, and give a second chance to an offender, if it is possible under the circumstances. You will thus gain their esteem and confidence, even though you may have to punish.

Thirdly, It is often urged by men opposed to women being on management committees, they are not educated sufficiently to understand the work, especially as to stock-taking; but in these days of school board education, where each sex has to pass the required standard before being allowed to leave, this charge is not true. To my mind, fitness for the work, coupled with education and judgment, is all that is needed, and surely a woman with an average training in ordinary home-work is as equally fitted for this work as a man who has been trained in entirely different branches of trade, and whose skill in matters pertaining to ordinary co-operative trading is very small. Surely the woman, with her training, has the advantage in this case; and everyone who has had the least experience in, or knowledge of stock-taking knows

that often the word of the department manager has to be taken, it being almost impossible to accurately measure or weigh the article in question, and, so far as my experience has gone, I have never had cause to doubt the justness of their estimates and decision. I have seen women even more particular in these things than some men, though all had conscientiously endeavoured to do their duty to the department and to the shareholders.

Fourthly, another reason why women should be members of management committees is to see that provision is made for the education of members and their children, where societies have no committee appointed for that purpose. And here I would remark that, to make the co-operative movement what we desire it should be, we must look after the education of the children, see they are taught thoroughly; and who can do this better than the mothers, whose words and actions are most noticeable? As women members of management committees, we must insist that this work is attended to. Some societies are doing well in the matter of education; others are doing little, if anything, to spread the principles. As guild women, we must urge our respective societies to attend to this work by appointing an educational committee, or the management committee doing the work themselves. I prefer a separate committee, as from experience the management has plenty of work to attend to. Still, this must be done, and women can do a large share of this work. If, as I said before, the co-operative movement is to succeed as we wish it to do, our young people must be taught to take up and carry on this work.

Fifthly, and lastly, the presence of women on management committees tends to ensure confidence amongst other women. However much some men speak against it, so far as my experience goes, while I have sat on the management committee I have always been treated by all with the utmost courtesy and respect. Any question asked has been answered fully and fairly, and every desire shown to give me any information respecting the subject under consideration. If, as women, we have time and opportunity to take up this work, let us make it our especial study, and seek to

make ourselves fully acquainted with the work in every department, determined to do our share of the work, and to do it well.

Some things may not be as pleasant work to us as others. We may prefer the drapery, millinery, or grocery department as more in accordance with our tastes; but the work of the farm, the mill, the butchering, or the coal departments is just as necessary to the prosperity and progress of the society, and, as a part of the work, needs, and must have equally with the others, our careful attention. I have ever found in these departments, as well as in the others, the employees appreciate an interest in their work, and are ever ready to give the fullest possible information regarding their departments. Our success depends upon attention to matters of detail in all departments; nothing must be considered as too small to need our notice. It is not wise to be too officious. Do your part of the work in every department, as well as at board meetings, quietly, earnestly, and justly. Then you will gain the confidence not only of your colleagues on the committee, but of the members of the society; and, by being faithful, conscientious, and obliging, will do much to remove the prejudice that exists in some minds against women taking up this work, and your service will be urged as a very strong reason for other women to take their share of the management of their respective societies alongside of the men.

These are only a few reasons, but ponder them well, go back to your societies, and—if you have not yet a woman on your management committee, and your rules admit both sexes—see to it that some able and competent women, with time and ability for the work, are nominated; then rally all your forces, and secure their election, give them your hearty and unanimous support, and I feel sure your societies will make greater progress, and you will not regret the course you have taken.

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